

# KANSAS

Kansas State Historical Society  
Cultural Resources Division

KATHLEEN SEBELIUS, GOVERNOR

## CERTIFICATION OF STATE REGISTER LISTING

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: Old Harper Fountain

Address: Intersection of Main Street and Central Avenue, Harper, KS 67058

Legal:

County: Harper

Owner: City of Harper

Address: 201 W. Main Street, Harper, KS 67058

National Register eligible \_\_\_\_\_

State Register eligible   X  

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on May 8, 2004.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

Richard D. Penkatz 5-12-04  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

9/95

## HARPER FOUNTAIN

### DESCRIPTION

#### Summary

Located at the intersection of Main Street and Central Avenue, the Harper Fountain is an approximately thirteen-foot tall, cast-iron drinking fountain with brackets supporting five globed lights. Erected in 1909, the fountain served its original purpose until a motorist ran into the fountain, turning it over and breaking the lights. Water service was terminated, and the fountain placed on a raised base with a four-way traffic light in place of the lighted globes. The altered fountain was removed in 1969 and replaced with a decorative brick water fountain. In 1983, the original drinking fountain was rehabilitated to resemble its original appearance, returned to the intersection of Main Street and Central Avenue, and placed on a raised, concrete-and-pebble aggregate base.

#### Elaboration

The original fountain was described in an article on the fountain dedication in the *Harper Advocate*, May 21, 1909:

The fountain stands in the square formed by the crossing of Main Street and Central (sic) Avenue. It is fifteen feet tall, from base to top of the lights, and weighs close on to a ton. The base is thirteen feet across and is built of cement. There is a 6 foot cement walk surrounding the base. The fountain (sic) is built in three parts, the fountain proper, support and the bracket for the lamps. There are two places that furnish drinking water and one at the base for the dogs. Five electric lights, one for each side and one on top, and which splendidly lights up the square. The fountain was placed over the old town well, well remembered by our old settlers, and in which the water cooler was placed. No expense was not spared in making everything permanent as possible, and there is no fears but what it will stand for many years.

At an unknown date, a motorist hit and upended the fountain, destroying the lighted globes. Water service was terminated, the fountain was placed on a raised base, and a four-way traffic light replaced the brackets and globes. This version of the fountain is evident in a photograph from the 1950s. In 1969, the fountain was removed and replaced with a decorative water fountain.

In 1983, the Harper Chamber of Commerce decided to re-install the original fountain. Although relatively intact, the two lions' heads that dispensed water were missing, and a portion of the fountain on one side was broken. A local wood carver volunteered to carve a wood replica of the lion's head. This replication and the broken piece were taken to a foundry in Norwich, Kansas, where they were reproduced at no charge. The traffic light was removed and replaced with a new light fixture similar to the original. The fountain

was then sandblasted, primed and painted a bronze color that was close to the original. Two duplicate brass plaques with a short history of the fountain were purchased and mounted on the north and south sides of the fountain. The fountain was placed on a new raised concrete base for added safety from its old nemesis, the automobile. Water service was not resumed, and the fountain is not a functional drinking fountain.

The current appearance of the fountain is the same as when renovated in 1983. The fountain is located on a raised, three-tiered, concrete-and-pebble aggregate base in the center of the intersection. The lower two tiers are circular, and the first tier measures ten feet in diameter and is twelve inches in height, while the second tier is five feet in diameter and twelve inches high. The third tier of the base is also twelve inches high, but is a square measuring forty-one inches per side.

Constructed of cast iron, the fountain proper consists of an elongated and tapered, four-sided shaft resting upon a simple cove base on a square plinth (34"x 34") and capped by an embellished entablature. On the east side of the base is a metal tag inscribed, "J L Mott Iron Wks NY." Atop the fountain proper is a light fixture consisting of the original ornamented, bowl-shaped base supporting the 1983-purchased octagonal shaft with four brackets and five globed lights. Total height of the fountain and light fixture is thirteen feet.

The fountain features two lions' heads (on the east and west sides respectively) that once dispensed water into half bowls decorated with egg-and-dart molding. Immediately above the lion's heads, the wide architrave is ornamented with garland and wreaths. The relatively narrow frieze is decorated with egg-and-dart molding, and the cornice contains scrolled acanthus leaf detailing.

The principal alterations to the fountain from its 1909 appearance are confined to the raised concrete base and the new light fixture. The original light fixture featured a decorative, tapered, round shaft supporting elaborate curved brackets. Other integrity considerations include the replication of the lions' heads and the modern addition of the descriptive plaques.

## SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

The Harper Fountain is being nominated to The Register of Historic Kansas Places under Criterion A for its association with the Harper Study and Social Club and the early history of the town of Harper.

### Elaboration

A party of eleven families from Bloomington, Iowa, founded the town of Harper on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1877. Located ten miles from the eastern line of the county and nine miles north of Anthony, the site was chosen in anticipation of the railroad. By 1880, Harper, which was named for Marion Harper of the Second Kansas Cavalry, was indeed the terminus for the Kansas City, Lawrence and Southern Kansas Railroad. Harper, with a population of 212, was organized as a city of the third class on September 7, 1880. The town contained two weekly and two daily newspapers, restaurants, a bakery, cigar factory, broom factory, hardware store, two livery stables, two blacksmith shops, lumber and coal yard and a wagon building establishment. Two years later, a Board of Trade was organized and a jewelry store, photographer's studio, brickyard, and a new combination coal yard and meat market opened for business. By 1883, the population had grown to 779, and the town included three banks, seven drug stores, five lumber yards, nine grocery stores and two saloons known as "Blind Tigers."

With its location on the railroad, Harper became an important shipping point for various agricultural products. The 1887 City Directory states that 2,986,340 bushels of corn, 960,000 bushels of wheat, and 800,000 bushels of oats were harvested that year. Alfalfa, cattle, and sheep were also raised extensively.

In 1887, two fires severely damaged the downtown area. Harper rebuilt and reached its population zenith in 1892 with 4000 people. Unfortunately, a tornado devastated the town in that year causing more than \$100,000 damage to buildings. Many chose not to rebuild as word spread of the impending Cherokee Strip opening.

It was during this post-cyclone rebuilding phase that the Harper Study and Social Club was organized in November of 1894. At the fountain dedication ceremony on May 21, 1909, Mary Coulson described the history and nature of the club:

In the past fifteen years our courses of study have embraced history, literature, philosophy, geographic and biographical subjects in their different phases and in a most comprehensive manner. Domestic economy and all matters pertaining to the economical and successful management of the home have been most thoroughly and intelligently considered. Moral philosophy, biblical history and such kindred subjects have had much attention.



Around 1907, the club decided to "do something useful and permanent, to benefit mankind and to further beautify our beloved little city." A public water fountain was decided upon, and the ladies of the club began a campaign to fund the project. Among the various food sales, the play "The Merry Minstrel Maids" was staged at the Old Opera House and a \$90 profit realized. The club eventually obtained the money needed to purchase the fountain, which was placed at the center of the Main Street and Central Avenue intersection. It was officially dedicated on May 14, 1909. Interestingly, the May 21, 1909 *Harper Advocate* article on the dedication of the fountain states that it cost \$600, while the 1983 plaque on fountain indicates it cost \$375. The article also mentions that earlier in the fall of 1908, the Harper Study and Social Club presented the city with a "stock watering fountain" which was placed a short distance south of the drinking fountain site.

The fountain served its original purpose well into the automobile age, but unfortunately, a careless motorist knocked the fountain over, destroying the light fixture. The water service was terminated, and a traffic light replaced the original light fixture when the fountain was righted. A postcard from the 1950s shows the erstwhile drinking fountain on a raised base with the four-way stoplight atop the shaft.

In 1969, the Harper Art Society replaced the traffic light/fountain with a decorative water fountain and stored the remains of the fountain at the local historical society on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street. The new brick structure had several towers that water trickled down to a basin below with multi-colored lights behind the water flows. Evidently, the basin was too small, allowing water to splash out into the street and onto passing vehicles. Algae on the bricks soon became a problem, and water service was again terminated.

In 1983, the local chamber decided to try to bring back the old fountain. Petitions for support were placed in businesses around town. It did not take long to gather over 500 signatures in favor of the project. There was only one negative vote. The chamber took these signatures to the city and asked for permission to start the project using only donated money. With the city's blessing, the chamber quickly raised the necessary funds for restoration. One local lady donated \$500 twice. She lived above the bank building in the center of town and said she missed the old fountain. On October 22, 1983, the rejuvenated Harper Fountain was presented to the city of Harper by the president of the Harper Chamber of Commerce. In front of a large crowd of townspeople and visitors, Mayor Hubert Johnson accepted the fountain on behalf of the city.

The fountain is the pride of the community and serves as a directional landmark. For its association with the Harper Social and Study Club and as the best known visual reminder of the early history of Harper, it is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places under Criterion A.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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